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ABSTRACT

This paper presents initial results of research on a distance education program developed in 1989 for the children of the Showmen's Guild of Australasia. The program accommodates the mobility of children and their parents who are rarely in any town for more than a week during the show circuit. The children complete correspondence lessons in various subjects and are assisted by their parents or home tutors. Several times a year, distance education teachers join the children during the show circuit and work intensively with them for several weeks. Unlike many other groups involved in the distance education program, the Showmen's Guild is well organized. It has a very supportive parent base and has campaigned over the years to establish favorable political support for a program to meet the special needs of its children. A literature review reveals that high mobility can place students at an educational disadvantage while placing an enormous burden on those providing the education for the mobile group. Interviews conducted with parents, children, home tutors, and teachers revealed close and trusting relationships between parents and distance education teachers and between students and distance education teachers. In addition, there is typically an intimate relationship between the mother and her children as it is the mother who takes on the responsibility for organizing and managing her children's education during a hectic working day. This paper concludes that the uniqueness of each mobile group must be taken into account when implementing an educational program, and delivery must respond to the socioeconomic and cultural attributes of each group. (LP)

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# "HERE TODAY, GONE NEXT WEEK":

## SOME LESSONS FOR THE DELIVERY OF ITINERANT PRIMARY SCHOOLING OF A DISTANCE EDUCATION PROGRAM DESIGNED FOR THE CHILDREN OF THE SHOWMEN'S GUILD OF AUSTRALASIA.

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## ABSTRACT

This paper presents the initial results of continuing research into a program designed by the School of Distance Education in Brisbane for a group of itinerant students - the children of the Showmen's Guild of Australasia. The program seeks to accommodate the mobility of children and their parents who are rarely in any town for more than a week during the show circuit. The intention of the paper is to analyse and contextualise this case study of an innovative method of delivering distance education.

In 1989, after active lobbying by members of the Showmen's Guild, the School of Distance Education in Brisbane introduced a program designed specifically to address the children's needs. The program has several distinctive features. The children complete correspondence lessons in various subjects covering all years of primary schooling. They are assisted in these lessons by their parents and/or home tutors and by School of Distance Education teachers who join them in some towns in the show circuit and work intensively with them during those weeks. These lessons are conducted in classrooms at local primary schools. Basic technologies such as the 008 telephone number are used to facilitate communication between parents and home tutors on the circuit and the teachers when they are in Brisbane.

Using the results of semi-structured interviews, the paper records and interprets multiple perspectives on the rationale, organisation and delivery of this distance education program. Issues relating to this delivery are explored as is its potential for more closely aligning the itinerant lifestyle and schooling needs of its clients.

# "HERE TODAY, GONE NEXT WEEK": SOME LESSONS FOR THE DELIVERY OF ITINERANT PRIMARY SCHOOLING OF A DISTANCE EDUCATION PROGRAM DESIGNED FOR THE CHILDREN OF THE SHOWMEN'S GUILD OF AUSTRALASIA.

## INTRODUCTION

According to the national policy report *Schooling in Rural Australia* little is known about itinerant students "including their number, characteristics, and movements into, out of, within rural areas" (Commonwealth Schools Commission, 1988, pp. 111-112). The present paper begins to redress the paucity of research in this area and reports on a distance education program designed for the children of the Showmen's Guild of Australasia. The program was established by the Queensland Department of Education in response to requests by the Showmen's Guild to take into account the unique difficulties of educating children on the show circuit. This research is important in that it seeks to commence exploring a model for distance education programs that may be utilised by other itinerant working families or less organised groups involved in the distance education program.[1]

In the initial part of the paper a brief overview of the clientele of the School of Distance Education, with particular reference to the Showmen's Guild, will be presented as a background to the study. The evolution of the methodology of the research will be clarified and general aspects of the data gathering techniques will be made explicit. Following this, a brief account of the tentative themes concerning the relationships involved in the educational provision, as emerging from the data, will be presented. Finally, some recommendations for future research directions, as well as some preliminary discussions concerning a model for the education for itinerant children will be discussed.

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[1] The writers are grateful to the following individuals and groups for their assistance in writing this paper: the children , parents, and the home tutors of the Showmen's Guild for agreeing to be interviewed; the staff of the Queensland School of Distance Education for their willing cooperation; former colleague Associate Professor Robert Baker for organising the idea of the study and obtaining the initial funding;the other members of the Professional Growth Research and Teaching Group; and the Faculty of Education for assisting with travel costs. The project was funded by a University of Central Queensland Research Grant (ER/U/399). The writers accept responsibility for the views expressed in the paper.

**BACKGROUND - School of Distance Education**

The Brisbane School of Distance Education is permanently based in Brisbane, but the actual setting of the school is where the students live, are temporarily based or are travelling. The school serves preschool to adult students who all experience some form of isolation and cannot access the regular Queensland systems. They are located in "suburban homes, caravans, tents, farms, yachts and even lighthouses, state-wide, interstate and internationally" (Rasmussen & Crew, 1992, p.2).

There are many different categories of students (Rasmussen, 1993) apart from the traditional geographically isolated distance student (outback properties, mines, lighthouses, etc,). They include:

1. **Overseas** - Queensland families travelling overseas or resident overseas for a limited period and intending to return to Queensland (embassies, religious missions, yachts etc.);

2. **Travelling** - Queensland families travelling within Australia and intending to return to Queensland (children of itinerant workers, round-Australia tourists, the Showmen's Guild etc.);

3. **Medical** - Students not able to attend school for a variety of medical reasons (pregnancy, long-term physical or psychological disabilities);

4. **Approved** - Students who, for a variety of reasons, are given approval to attend a school of distance education rather than a regular school. This category includes those students who have been excluded from attendance at regular schools ( eg. for reasons of discipline);

5. **Home schoolers** - Families who have approval for home schooling and pay a fee for distance education (in tandem with parents/others who reject current forms of public education, often for religious, political or ideological reasons):

6. **Primary school based** - A small number of secondary students who use the local primary or secondary school as a base for their distance education studies;

7. **Secondary school based** - Students who undertake one or two subjects in the distance education mode.

The research focus of this report is concerned with the Showmen's Guild children, (Category 2). It can be seen that, within the total context of the distance education

program, the group under investigation is small in number and represents only one of many groups vying for limited resources. However, because an education program has been developed to meet the special needs of this group, research into its operation seems pertinent.

Unlike many other groups involved in the distance education program, the Showmen's Guild is well organised. It has a very supportive parent base and has campaigned, over the years, to establish favourable political support for a program to meet the special needs of its students. Generations of Showmen's Guild families have travelled throughout Australia to work at shows. In the past, children spent their school years moving from school to school and battling the demands of the schools of distance education from a variety of states. However, in 1989, strong petitioning from the Queensland families of the Guild resulted in the assigning of two teachers to provide a continuous, coordinated program. The two teachers adapted existing materials from the School of Distance Education as well as individualised material to be used at eighteen schools throughout Queensland for the week of each respective show.

Supply teachers were employed in each location to supervise the children and help overcome any problems associated with the itinerant lifestyle and the children's education. Currently, three teachers from the School of Distance Education, are employed to undertake the teaching of the children from a distance and at various schools on the circuit. It is against this background that the current research is set.

## RELATED LITERATURE

The Queensland Department of Education's response to the education of Showmen's Guild children is unique in Australia. This uniqueness can be clearly seen in the model of distance education learning that is being offered to this group of children who change school and town almost weekly. The following literature review selects areas of the theory of distance learning, home schooling and the education of itinerant children, as these affect the education of this interesting group of children.

Distance learning, as defined by Holmberg (1989), "covers the various forms of study at all levels which are not under the continuous, immediate supervision of tutors present with their students in lecture rooms or at the same premises but which, nevertheless, benefit from the planning, guidance and teaching of a supporting organisation" (p.3). As is the case with Holmberg's work, the main research emphasis of the literature of distance learning is tertiary learning, not primary or secondary school learning. However, the key concepts of Holmberg's definition - the lack of continuous, immediate supervision - apply to the primary and secondary distance education and indeed to the

group in this study. Sewart, Keegan and Holmberg (1983) discuss the multi-media approach which distinguishes distance learning from correspondence learning. This multi-media approach is an integral feature of the program being studied here with lessons provided in the print form, audio tapes and telephone and regular, face-to-face contact seen as essential elements of the program.

According to Holmberg (1989), certain hypotheses may be generated from the study of distance learning. The hypotheses from his study that may be applied to primary and secondary distance learning are:

- learning is promoted by the student fitting subject matter into existing cognitive structures;
- warmth in human relationships, bearing on the study situation, is conducive to emotional development;
- feelings of rapport with tutors, counsellors, and the supporting organisation generally strengthen and support study motivation as well as promote study pleasure;
- learning is encouraged by frequent communication with fellow humans interested in the study;
- intrinsic motivation is a crucial condition for learning. (p. 162).

These hypotheses, while important factors to the present study, are influenced by several elements including the bond with the teachers from the School of Distance Education, the rapport with the supply teacher and/or the influence of the home tutor. These roles would seem to be crucial to the success of the distance learning program.

Clark (1990) refers to a study by Higgins (1985), which defined isolation by geography, ethnicity, culture, language, social, economic, professional and exceptionality. Clark (1990) suggests that remoteness is a problem unique to the provision of education in rural areas. Clark's notion of isolation through geographic remoteness blends with Higgins' concept of isolation through culture and profession for the Showmen's Guild children, coupled with a further factor not explored by either writer, that of constant mobility.

Newman (1988) in a study of the education of mobile students in the United States of America draws attention to the fact that little definitive research is available on the effects of mobility of achievement and adjustment of mobile students. He notes that the available studies display a correlation between mobility and poor achievement in language, reading and mathematics. The Eric Digest (1991) supports this view by claiming that high mobility negatively affects student achievement. Each of these studies, while talking of the education of mobile students, does make points that are relevant to the education of the Showmen's Guild children. Both of these indicate that high

mobility can place the mobile students at an educational disadvantage while placing an enormous burden on those providing the education for the mobile group. They further see that the services that are provided for one group may not necessarily meet the needs of another equally mobile population.

The UNESCO meeting of national specialists on the conditions governing the schooling of the children of mobile populations (1989) identified the problems of providing schooling for itinerant children as including the teaching methods and learning conditions of mobility; the social and family structures and the related socio-cultural and socio-economic factors. This meeting echoed the fear "that children of mobile groups will be marginalised from lack of adequate preparation to cope with the changes of the future" (UNESCO, 1989, p.19). They argued for "an effective and relevant schooling for the different categories of itinerant children from the point of view of equality of education and from the view of access to education." (UNESCO, 1989, p.19.) Liegosis (1987), when studying the education of gipsies commented on the need for information to correct the prejudices and stereotyping that lie beyond what is done on behalf of the transient group. His study recognised the diversity of the gipsy reality . A study by Ezomala (1990) saw that it was important to use the culture of the group and their experiences as a starting point in the provision of education programs. Each of these studies has implications for the education of the children of the Showmen's Guild. The children are aware that they are a unique group and that there is a wide range of learning conditions within the group just as there is a wide diversity within the group. Evidence indicates that this program is effective due to the recognition of the provision of specific teaching methods to cater for the needs of this transient group.

Tomlinson, Coulter and Peacock (1986), in a study of home schooling in Western Australia, took the triadic and dynamic model of teaching that was developed by Hyman (1974) and added the home tutor. See Fig 1.

Tomlinson et al. confirm that in the distance learning mode teacher, pupil and content continue as essential elements of the teaching process although the teacher operates from a distance. The present study is compounded by the reality that the teacher does not always operate from a distance as there is regular contact at towns where the show is being held. Tomlinson et.al. noted that the distance issue was compounded by factors such as the time lag between submission and return of the pupil's work (p.63). They found that the student identified strongly with the teacher but it was the home tutor who provided the link between the content, student and teacher. In this case the teacher from the School of Distance Education, be playing a part-time itinerant role, is able to provides a direct link especially when the show circuit is in Queensland whereas the supply teacher

at the school and/or a home tutor have the responsibility of maintaining that link at other times.

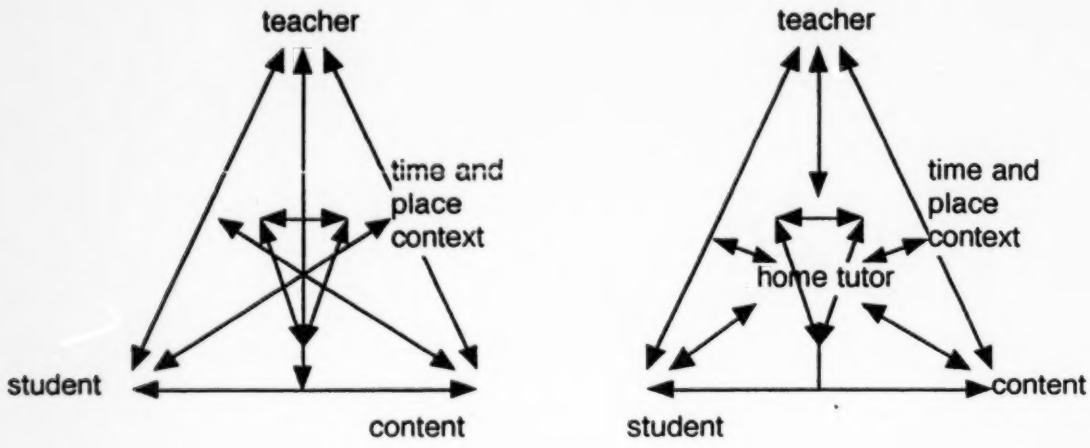


Fig 1: Tomlinson, D. et.al. (1986). Teaching and learning at home: Distance education and the isolated child. Nedlands, WA: National Centre for Research on Rural Education, p.62f.

[ It should be noted here that the program being studied supports children on one "run " of the show circuit. Other "runs" do not have the same level of support at this time.]

## METHODOLOGY

Perhaps as a consequence of two independent but related factors - the large number of researchers involved in the project and their employment in an institution with an emerging rather than an established research culture - the theoretical framework is qualitative and falls largely in the interpretive paradigm (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Sampson & Kenway, 1992).

A report of an earlier stage of this study (Wyer, Woodrow, Hallinan, Rose, Danaher, Kindt, Moran, Purnell & Thompson, 1992) explained the methodology in terms of sampling, interviewing techniques and ethical considerations. The conceptual framework guiding these practical aspects of the research methodology derived from the form of grounded theory advocated by Glaser and Strauss (1967). This paper, and Two other papers being presented simultaneously (Danaher, Rose & Hallinan, 1993; Rose, 1993), constitute "limited report[s] on one or a few forms" of the data, but depart from Glaser & Strauss in that we do not mean that wea are at "the point of saturation".
(Sultana, 1991, p.65).

In keeping with this approach, we took to the field a general (and generally shared) perspective, with a view to developing a more detailed understanding of the Showmen's Guild children from the data that we collected. Our main research tool was a large number of semi-structured interviews, conducted with as many children, parents, and home tutors as agreed to talk to us.[2] With the assistance of the *Hyperqual* computer package, we engaged in careful coding of the interview transcripts, following Strauss' (1987) recommendation to carry out open, axial, and selective coding. In the process of coding, we were careful to record or "memo" our growing understanding of what we encountered.[3]

Various means were enacted to ascertain the extent to which individual perceptions were shared by other researchers. During breaks between interviews, and after the interviews had been completed, the researchers discussed with one another what appeared to be emerging. We obtained valuable feedback from staff members at the Queensland School of Distance Education, which helped to clarify our thinking and to correct some misconceptions. Finally, the 1993 stage included questions designed to check our developing perceptions with members of the Showmen's Guild.

## DELIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

There are two main delimitations of the study that should be noted at this point.

The study is not intended to constitute an evaluation of the program established by the Queensland School of Distance Education. In the course of our investigations we have uncovered several comments about particular aspects of the program, and about its overall effectiveness. We have presented a selection of these comments in relevant sections of the data analysis, and we would be pleased if some of the comments lead to adjustments to the program by the staff members of the School of Distance Education. Nevertheless the point should be reiterated that our primary concern has been to situate the schooling experiences of the children of the Showmen's Guild in the context of their lived experiences, and suggestions for program changes lie outside our research brief.

As will be seen in the next section of the paper, data from the study could be interpreted in several ways, using a large number of alternative categories. Some team members who were involved in the study but were unable to participate this year might well re-enter the research in the ensuing years; this would undoubtedly influence the directions of

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[2] The interviews were conducted in July, 1992 at the Mackay Show, and a total of sixteen children, seven parents and three home tutors were interviewed.

[3] The researchers are able to identify with some of the coding difficulties explicated by Fleet and Cambourne (1989).

the future stages of the study. One area for potentially fruitful investigation derives from the gendered roles of the participants in the children's schooling experiences. Another area could be centred on the political dimension of the program, including the question of whether it problematises or perpetuates class based interactions of the show circuit. Neither of these points has been developed any further at this stage.

## INTERPRETATION OF DATA

### The relationships between parent and teacher

The data obtained in this study suggest there is a close relationship between parent and teacher. From our limited contact with the two groups, we were able to observe both formal and informal interactions. It seemed that the teachers encouraged parents to bring their children to the schoolroom and it was during this time that much of the informal communication took place with some parents spending longer periods in the room and having morning tea with the teachers. The atmosphere was similar to that encouraged by the preschool teachers in Queensland who invite parent participation to a greater degree than their primary or secondary counterparts.

There appeared to be a camaraderie between parents and teachers as if they were part of a shared mission and because parents had been involved in the genesis of the program there was a feeling of ownership: *we have a gauge, a learning system that we can control and I know*. One parent expressed the view that teachers and parents were "pioneering". Most parents were quick to praise the tremendous gains that the program has brought to the education of their children. The corresponding positive parent/teacher relationships that have resulted since the program's inception were nonetheless, in many interviews, contrasted sharply to conditions that existed prior to 1989: [Before the program] *the choices that were available to the parents were zilch, they just went from school to school and there was no continuity or gauge on what kids were doing, so they got a certain age and lost interest very quickly.*

It seems that until recently it was common for the Showmen's Guild children to have to attend an assortment of schools and become familiar with a number of teachers. Piecemeal education of this type was the norm. *L__: My mum done pretty much the same thing, went from school to school and she went to boarding school for a few years.* Such experiences as these, had a resultant negative effect on the views held by parents. *A__: the kids were only there a week so they (the teachers) would send them up the back ... and I suppose the teachers thought , "Well, what can I teach this kid in three days, I won't worry about it:" so they didn't.....*

Parents believed that teachers held negative views towards the show children and this did little to encourage meaningful relationships. *A__: some teachers did not accept show children- ... some people are just ignorant, some people have got a set against us - they put our children in a group of unruly children...* Schools, too, helped perpetuate this perceived discrimination when, contrary to their legal responsibilities, they refused to enrol the children. *A__:* [the schools] *never used to accept us.* Some parents realised that the principal was important: *the school is mostly a reflection of the principal's attitude towards things and if you got a good attitude, well you've got a whole school with a good attitude.* Others believed that the negative view of show people was widespread. *K__: I think, like we've never had a good reputation, we always had a bad reputation.*

In contrast to the negative relationships that existed prior to 1989, views of the new program were very positive. *J__: We have got a very good relationship with the schools in Queensland... nothing is too much trouble for the [distance education teachers] ... the kids come home bouncing and happy and tell you all the things they did and so you know they've really had a good day. That's great in itself to see themselves happy with what they are doing.*

_ , a teacher who has been prominent since the beginning of the program, features in many of the interviews with parents and from these a picture emerges that suggests a parent/teacher relationship based on mutual respect, trust and cooperation. At the beginning of the program, C__ was perceived as a catalyst. *J__:Once we got C__ involved, then it skyrocketed* from there and she was seen as important because: *she really pushes things along, gets things going.*

The parent/teacher relationship that has been cultivated over the years is based upon the access parents feel they are able to have with the teachers in general and C__ in particular, *L__: any problems we just go back to C__* . These problems ranged across a spectrum, from placing a child in an interstate school that was reluctant to accept show children. *L__: You [now] have a nice written out letter. C__ said it is like you had a big hammer in your hand,* to helping out with administrative problems: *I ring C__ .. she's very good at handling administration.* C__ also advised parents about the employment of home tutors: *I picked one up from C__ ...she found out there was one available and she was a sort of contact.*

Not only was C__ different from past teachers: *C__ has been with us. And she's been in our homes, like years ago they never did,* she was deemed to be a good classroom teacher: *J__'s Year 1 teacher was great, but C__ just... she does up all the computer*

*paper for her. I'll have to show you her anthology that C__ did up - it's really good,* and she was able to handle difficult children: *K__:People focus on him because he was the bad boy* [by reputation]. *Oh yeah, C__ like he was very aggressive - used to throw chairs around - but C__ explained to him that that's not acceptable ... the improvement is two or three hundred per cent.*

**The relationships between children and teachers**

The children see that it is "normal" to travel and to set-up school each week in a different school in a different towns. The place appears to be of little consequence to their lifestyle as do the differences between schools. They usually had to think about where they went to school in the previous week. However, when asked about their teacher(s), they able to name them quickly...*L__:but she left and K__was my teacher, so now I've got M__ . We seen her about once every two shows...We seen them back at Bundaberg, and Rocky was the last show after Bundaberg, so I remember now.*

The relationships between the teachers and the students is different from that which would be established in the regular classroom. The children spoke freely about their interactions with the three teachers indicating the closeness of those relationships. While they identify with one teacher as their class teacher, they have a close relationship with the other teachers and are ready to draw on them when their teacher is not available. It is a relationship built on trust, reliance and communication. The children call their teachers by their first names and this does not detract from respect they hold for them as teachers[4] *...C__ and P__ and M__ ... Well, P__ is my teacher..or our papers, which like .... as in weeks, she gives us more weeks .... with me and sometimes, like I was talking about before, the theme, that as well. She does that with us, as well at the school, so ....C__ , she gives you all the stuff to do, sculptures. But usually I'm just on correspondence. _. Well, all I'm doing is working with the correspondence .... have a lot of fun with C__: No. Mum talks to C__ a little bit. Even though M__ 's my teacher who's marking my work and everything, we still get help from C__ ... ...P__ and all...Yes. Like, you help this one and I'll help this one. If you ring up when M__ 's not there, then C__ will talk to you.*

The students work with the teachers at different schools and in different towns and in between these sessions work with their home tutors or by themselves to complete the work supplied by the teachers in the form of correspondence papers.

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4 It should be noted that they also call their home tutors by their first names and so it would seem natural in this environment to use the same form of address when talking to their teachers.

*_: Now, when you move around from place to place doing your lessons with Katie, and then C__ comes along, does C__ do the same work as you're been doing with Katie, or does she give you new work?*

The mobile telephone appears to have had an impact on the lives of the members of the Showmen's Guild by providing immediate, distance communication from the privacy of their mobile homes. The students interviewed spoke of the frequent telephone contact that their home tutor and or parents had with the teachers. A__: *Because my nan, they've got a mobile phone, and they just ring it up every now and then and say I need more work and when I've finished, send things up and all that. Mum'd just ring up and say, "I want some more work," or something.* The communication is two way with the teachers sometimes telephoning the families. *J__: Mrs F__ ...Yes...She just asks how school's going - and she wants to speak to mum sometimes.* However the majority of the students indicated that the main contact was as *A__* said *No, we only contact them for more work, say if I've done about three papers .... and send some more over.*

When asked about the subjects that they enjoyed, the majority of the students preference was for mathematics although one student was particularly interested in writing and poetry and another was interested in art. *J__:. Maths....Because it's easy and I like it. And I like plussing - and I just like it.*
*I'm best at Maths...But I like English. I like English a little bit better though, I'm better at Maths than English, but I like English a little bit more.*
*Because I like working at the sums, and you get lots of [games] in mathematics.*
This was verified with one of the home tutors who commented that the children handled money from an early age as a part of the work expected of them within the family business as well as developing a concept of space and size through having to assist in the assembling of the "joints".

As are all children these were ready to talk about their friends. They see themselves as having close friends with whom they play while at school and at home. They commented that they usually did not play with the town children at the school...*L__:Well, I normally don't play with them, I normally just keep playing with the show's kids ... because I know them better and I can trust them. And they're friends who have been friends for a long time....we have a look at all the different parts of the playground, like there's really weird things .... like there's nothing much that we do do. We don't go and make friends with other people because we're just leaving again straight away, and things like that.* Play, for them, is usually a style of parallel play while at school in that they play in the same areas as the school's students but not with those students.

**The relationships between parents and children.**

Within the Showmen's Guild there appears to be a clear differentiation between women's and men's roles. The mother is the parent who organises and manages her children's education within a hectic working day. At show time it is almost invariably the mothers who bring their children to the local school, with some staying to help out for a while before having to return for show work. Similarly, the mothers collect their children after school or provide transport to school related afternoon activities.

While both parents support the current pattern of educational delivery to the Guild's children, the relationship between mother and child seems crucial to the effectiveness of immediate educational deliver and to longer term considerations. With regard to the latter, the strength of the Guild's identity is expressed, in one way, through the children seeing their future within the Guild. The parents support such a view but accept that as the Guild grows all their children will not be able, automatically, to remain showmen. The mothers openly accept the inevitability of some of the show children having to find careers outside the show world. Education provides the means through which other career options can be realised.

Educational delivery takes place against this background of change which gives urgency to the parents' concerns that their children receive a high quality primary education as a foundation for their secondary schooling and adulthood. The need to prepare for possibilities beyond the appeal of a showman's life is conveyed in J__'s comment:

*... here it's fun and work... it's a little bit fantasy land sometimes... I want my son to go to boarding school because I want him to see the different lifestyles and have a choice in what he wants to do.*

A robust work ethic and a perspective that looks beyond show life imbues the parent - child relationship with regard to schooling. For the mother, the relationship depends on her role: a mother who tutors or a mother who employs a tutor.

The often conflicting roles of mother and tutor create tensions well understood by anyone who has educated their children over a reasonable length of time. *A__*'s comment seems to reflect part of the child's dilemma with such role conflict: "*... Mum keeps you in until over three o'clock and that*". A sense of the mother's frustration and anguish with the two roles comes through in *J__*'s re *M__*'s: " *I think you've got to have a lot of patience to do correspondence with your own kids. I mean, to be a mother and a teacher and the kids just saying "Well, I'm not doing it". If you're a teacher you can say "Yes you are" but if you're the mother you just don't seem to be able to do anything about it. I've seen plenty of people nearly fall apart trying to do correspondence*". Perhaps partial resolution, with an educational cost, occurs when, as *N__* notes " *...you're a mother, really, first*".

For women juggling work related as well as parenting and teaching roles, viable solutions can be reduced to either sending their children to boarding school or employing a tutor. The latter relieves much of the pressure felt by tutoring mothers but still requires a close monitoring role. The succinctness of *J__*'s remarks... *"I see everything before it goes back"*- probably masks the real and potential stresses involved in this aspect of parenting.

Whether mothers tutor or employ a tutor, they feel responsible for keeping their children up-to-date with their papers and with getting work through to the school quickly. Responsibility brings self doubt: doubt as to whether education through distance education is in their children's best interests; or that the tutor is effective; or that they as tutors are effective teachers. *R__*, for example, commented: *"Maybe you can do one subject better than another so when it comes out ... they might pick up your good points and your bad points"* .

Acceptance of responsibility for their children's learning is far more than parental protectiveness. The intimacy of the relationship with their children allows the mothers to *" keep in close "*. They understand their children, work with them on the show, share the children's restricted working space at home, and know what their children are doing and how they are going in their studies. *K__*'s observation exemplifies the monitoring effect of keeping in close which is a powerful aspect of the parent - child relationship: *"...well I think you know how much she's learning. like if you're in a school you don't really know unless you've got a child who will tell you and there're not many of those and a good teacher. Well, we know where the kids are at"*."

## IMPLICATIONS FOR DELIVERY OF DISTANCE EDUCATION

At the Meeting of national specialists on the conditions governing the schooling of children of mobile populations, (UNESCO, 1989), the statement was made that there is a danger in transposing the effective educational provision for one mobile group to other groups. This would appear to be equally the case here as, unlike most other groups of itinerant people in Australia, the Showmen's Guild is a highly organised socio-economic and socio-cultural group with a long, proud tradition. They have a regular circuit that they follow, with established sites for both their mobile homes and their businesses in each centre that they visit. When the show is operating they work long hours; it is somewhat an insular community that sets up, works, packs up and moves on in a highly organised manner. A highly structured, well organised schooling system would seem to be most effective in meeting their needs and the needs of their children as busy business families. As other itinerant groups in Australia cannot claim to have the same degree of

organisation, it would follow the education provided to this group may not necessarily be translated to the specific needs of other groups.

The effectiveness of this educational program is, in large part, derived from the genuine commitment of the families, usually the mothers, to the education process. It is apparent that those involved value education as necessary for their children so that they have the opportunity to leave the show circuit should they choose to do so. The parents and home tutors appreciated the materials from the School of Distance Education but more importantly they appreciated having a clearly defined group of teachers with whom they identify. Comment was made that the teachers had been into their homes and this lead to a better understanding of their lifestyles which, in turn, lead to a more effective delivery of educational services to their children. This would imply that the specialist teacher model that is employed with this group is effective for this form of mobility as it enables confident parental and student participation.

The provision of teachers at gathering places is a striking feature of this program as it is seen as pulling the facets of the educational program back together again. This also adds a degree of educational normality to the program as there is a clearly defined group of students, not unlike a multi-age or family grouping class, working with a team of teachers. The children said that they saw a teacher from the School of Distance Education at about every second show and, while the circuit was in Queensland, worked with supply teachers in other towns. The distance education papers remain the focus of educational delivery in all centres but the work is frequently modified and enriched by activities, such as art, craft, drama, and music. All of these activities are difficult to deliver in the distance mode, and can be presented at these gathering places and consequently enhance the educational provision and make attending school meaningful and enjoyable. The regularity of the educational routine contributes structure and centrality to the students' program. They regard the individual schools as incidental educational sites rather than important geographical locations. There is potential for the relationships to change if the close grouping were fragmented by the inclusion of different students from different backgrounds and with different needs at each gathering point. The warning contained in one child's statement should be heeded *Well, I normally don't play with them, I normally just keep playing with the show's kids ... because I know them better and I can trust them. And they're friends who have been friends for a long time.*

Technology is playing a significant role in the functioning of the program. The regular receipt of papers ensures a continuous educational program; overnight parcel delivery services have removed remoteness from the program; the mobile telephone used by both

parents and teachers plus parental access to the 008 telephone number have revolutionised communication between the family and the school. All parents interviewed spoke of the ease of communication that they had with the teachers. This greatly assisted them in supporting the materials from the School of Distance Education. Together these have contributed to enhancing the relationships between the participants and the educators and creating the concept of a class taught by a team of teachers.

The above implications have been discussed in the paper, Meeting of national specialists on the conditions governing the schooling of children of mobile populations, (UNESCO, 1989). One of the concerns that this international meeting addressed was with relationships in the educational endeavour. They recognised the need to bring the effective participation of parents into the schooling of their children while taking into regard the learning environment of the child. They warned that the primary aim was to answer the question of "how solutions could be defined for the schooling of children in conjunction with the mobile population themselves taking into account

- knowledge of the population
- needs and demands for schooling among these populations
- transition from the educational need to the educational project and the definition of educational action - what methods should be used".(p.20).

Another major feature of their discussions was the provision of educational programs at gathering places. While this is regarded as important for the educational provision for nomadic people, it is seen also as a major factor in the education provision for itinerant people. The strength and indeed the uniqueness of the program offered by the School of Distance Education is that it's success is due to close relationships and a valued program is provided at the main gathering points of the Showmen's Guild.

It has not been our intention in the research to this point to attempt to develop an understanding of the model of educational provision in operation. However, it is worth noting that the current research indicates that the model of distance education, as outlined by Tomlinson et.al., does not appear to apply to the education of this group of mobile students. This, in no small part, is due to the regular sessions at the gathering places which enable the teachers to have the central role while the parent and/or the home tutor have that role when the teachers are not present. Therefore the model as described by Tomlinson et.al. may need significant modification if it were to be applicable in this situation.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has presented our developing understanding of the education of this group of mobile students. While the Showmen's Guild can be seen as a minority group, what it lacks in numbers is compensated for by an organisational strength and business continuity over several generations.

Relationships are important to all facets of these people's lives. They are aware that they are a misunderstood group within the community; they know that they are successful business people; they recognise that education is necessary for their children to succeed in the family business and/or away from the family business. The form of educational delivery currently operating is based on a trusting relationship with identified teachers who know and understand their lifestyle. This type of relationship is likely to foster the education that they require for their children.

This research is only beginning to understand the issues related to the education of mobile students. It is apparent, however, that the educational requirements of the children of the Showmen's Guild are centred on the rich culture of the group and the relationships both within the Showmen's Guild and with the teachers. As learned from this study, review of the necessary conditions for the effective education of different groups of mobile students must take into account the uniqueness of each group. In this way, educational delivery will respond to the socio-economic and cultural attributes of that particular group.

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